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SUBJECT: GAZA UPDATE - JANUARY 16, 1700 LOCAL

REFTEL: Jerusalem 147

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Hamas Political Bureau Chief Mish'al told a summit of Arab leaders (and the Iranian President) in Qatar January 16 that Hamas would not accept Israeli conditions for a cease-fire. Military operations in Gaza continued. Nine rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel as of 1600 local. In the West Bank, a 15-year-old Palestinian was killed in clashes with the IDF near Hebron.

¶2. (SBU) Kerem Shalom crossing was open on January 16. Karni's conveyer belt and the Nahal Oz fuel transfer station were closed. Erez was open to international NGO employees. UNRWA operations continued, albeit at reduced capacity. The IDF prohibited most north-south travel in Gaza on January 16. As a result, UNRWA was unable to transfer supplies from its Rafah warehouse to Gaza City. Fighting in areas of Gaza City on January 15 left local infrastructure severely damaged. End summary.

Political Developments

¶3. (SBU) Hamas Political Bureau Chief Khaled Mish'al told a summit of Arab leaders (and President Ahmadinejad of Iran) in Qatar January 16 that Hamas's demands for a cease-fire are an immediate end to violence and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, an end to the siege of Gaza, and the opening of all Gaza crossings. He said Hamas will not accept Israeli conditions for a cease-fire. He claimed Israel is using "banned" weapons in Gaza that have killed and injured civilians as well as militants. He said Gaza will require extensive post-conflict reconstruction and Hamas is ready to engage in Palestinian reconciliation. Mish'al and Musa Abu Marzuq from Hamas, Ramadan Shallah of Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and Ahmad Jibril of the PFLP General Command (PFLP-GC) comprised the Palestinian delegation. PA President Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen) did not attend.

Military Operations

¶4. (SBU) An IAF airstrike killed three militants launching rockets from Bayt Lahiya, and an IDF tank shell killed a six-year-old girl and wounded three Palestinians in Jabaliya January 16. The IDF shelled a Hamas security installation in Khan Yunis. As of 1415 local January 16, Gaza-based medical sources estimated the number of dead at 1,133 and the number of wounded at 5,150.

¶5. (SBU) A total of nine rockets were fired into Israel from Gaza before 1600 local January 16, injuring one and sending several people into shock.

One killed in the West Bank

¶6. (SBU) A fifteen-year-old Palestinian was killed and 23 others wounded during clashes with the IDF in the H2 area of Hebron January

16, where 1,500 people protested. Protesters skirmished with the IDF near Nil'in, Qalandiya, and Ma'sara (near Bethlehem). Four people were wounded by rubber-coated bullets, and 17 people were treated for tear gas inhalation. Israeli police dispersed dozens of protesters in East Jerusalem after Friday prayers. A peaceful demonstration took place in Ramallah.

Crossings

¶17. (SBU) January 16: Kerem Shalom crossing was open for approximately 30-50 truckloads, according to transportation contacts. Power plant contacts reported that they expected approximately 130,000 liters of industrial fuel via Kerem Shalom. Karni conveyor belt and Nahal Oz fuel transfer stations were closed. UNRWA coordinated shipments from Kerem Shalom crossing to Rafah city.

¶18. (SBU) January 15: A total of 69 truckloads (including 33 for aid agencies) entered Kerem Shalom. (UNRWA was able to escort truckloads from Kerem Shalom crossing only to warehouses in Rafah city.) Karni's conveyor belt and Nahal Oz fuel transfer station were closed. 15 truckloads of food, medical, and relief supplies entered Gaza via Rafah. Eighteen medical cases were evacuated, and five doctors and five journalists were allowed in, at Rafah.

Internal Movement/Coordination

¶19. (SBU) A "humanitarian pause" was in effect between 1000 and 1400 local on January 16, but UN contacts reported several large explosions during that time. The IDF prohibited most north-south

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travel in Gaza on January 16. As a result, UNRWA was unable to transfer supplies from its Rafah warehouse to Gaza City.

¶10. (SBU) UNRWA Director Gaza John Ging reported on January 16 that UNRWA had already identified another warehouse and planned to relocate UNRWA's logistics office there. The IDF attack on UNRWA's warehouse on January 15 destroyed the bulk of food, medicine, and non-food support packages for UNRWA operations in Gaza. Ging added that UNRWA moved forklifts and other equipment needed for UNRWA's logistic operations, which were not damaged in the fire. Ging noted that UNRWA's main transport contractor company continues to operate. Ging hopes to resume UN convoys from Kerem Shalom to Gaza City on January 17.

Aftermath of January 15 Fighting

¶11. (SBU) USAID contractor and fuel sector executives said that the Tal al-Hawa neighborhood in western Gaza City, the scene of heavy fighting on January 15, has been almost completely evacuated. Contacts estimated that 40,000 Palestinians live in the area, which is the location of the Palestinian Red Crescent al-Quds hospital. Gaza contacts visited this hospital on January 16 and reported that the entire building was burned and destroyed. All patients and staff were reportedly safely evacuated.

¶12. (SBU) Press reports that tens of thousands of Gaza City residents attended the funeral of Hamas leader Said Siam and other Hamas members killed January 16 in the Shaykh Radwan neighborhood. Paramedics retrieved at least 23 bodies from Tel al-Hawa after the IDF redeployed from the area, and reported that the neighborhood sustained enormous damage to infrastructure and private property.

ICRC Compound Overrun

¶13. (SBU) According to an ICRC staff member in Gaza, members of the notorious Dughmush clan broke into the ICRC compound in Gaza City on January 15. As of 1700 local time on January 16, they remained unwelcome guests on the premises.

Food

¶14. (SBU) UNRWA operated seven of its ten food distribution sites, and delivered food to almost all of its shelters on January 15-16. However, reports from January 15 indicated UNRWA has been unable to distribute food to one shelter in the far north, where heavy fighting has occurred. WFP has not been able to distribute food since January 15.

Electricity

¶15. (SBU) Power plant contacts said that the plant's output on January 16 is 30 MW. Plant managers reported that one day of fuel remains at the plant, but that one day of industrial fuel (130,000 liters) is expected to arrive on January 16.

¶16. (SBU) Power plant contacts underscored that numerous power lines and internal distribution transformers have been destroyed since December 27, complicating power transmission - especially in Gaza City. Technicians have not been able to access many downed lines and transformers.

Displacement

¶17. (SBU) UNRWA opened five new shelters in Gaza City for a total of 50 shelters throughout Gaza Strip, housing approximately 46,000 people. Fuel sector and water authority contacts said that many Gaza families have invited other dislocated families into their homes.

Cash

¶18. (SBU) UNRWA reported it had to cancel the plan to move cash into Gaza on January 16 due to the events of January 15.

WALLES